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Charles River Canoe Guide

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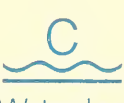


Charles River Watershed Association
2391 Commonwealth Avenue,
Auburndale, Massachusetts 02166.

Introduction

Canoeing is one of the most satisfying recreational experiences. The silence of a canoe moving through the water reinforces the oneness of man with nature. It is without equal for the full enjoyment of the sights and sounds of a river environment.

The Charles River is one of eastern Massachusetts' most treasured natural resources and has been canoed continuously since the days of the Indians. This Charles River Canoe Guide is intended to assist all who would dip a paddle in search of the wonders of the river.

Good Canoeing!

Acknowledgements

While many people have contributed to the preparation of this guide, special recognition is rendered to Kenneth H. Wood for the text and Bruce L. Lund of the Massachusetts Audubon Society for the map work.

Cover photograph: Margaret Faulkner

Charles River Profile

The Charles River watershed is only 30 miles in length, but the river twists and turns within the watershed for 80 miles, as can be seen in the centerfold map of the watershed. (The Indian name for the Charles was Quinobequin = meandering.) This meandering is typical of rivers on the Atlantic Coastal Plain, for the plain has only a gentle slope toward the ocean. Thus the river flow lacks the speed and force to cut a straight deep channel, and the waters are deflected around hills, glacial sand and gravel ridges, and occasional outcrops of bedrock.

The present flow of the Charles River bears little resemblance to the original as stream flow has been modified by man with the construction of 20 dams and more than 90 bridges. The dams are a mixed blessing: they retard flow which prevents some upper reaches from drying up in summer, but they also create ponds where water pollution intensifies since the river is unable to flush itself in uninterrupted flow.

Water Conditions

The volume of water varies seasonally, but most of the Charles is canoeable at any season. The major exception is the area above the Medway Dam nearest the headwaters (see Main Stem section).

Rapids and other natural hazards are few and are clearly marked on the maps (XXX). The dams are also indicated, and the portages around them are described in the text opposite the section map.

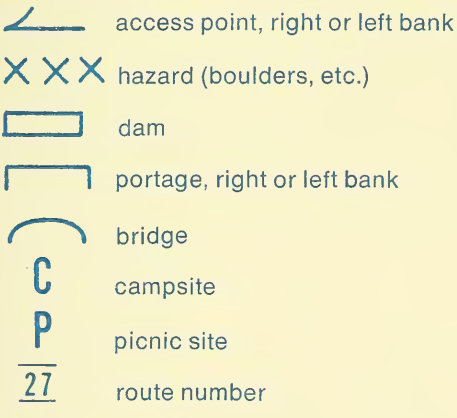
Camping and Picnicking

Both camping and picnicking sites are indicated on the maps, and more are planned for public lands in the near future. Permission to camp on private grounds must be requested of the landowner in advance. *Canoeists have the responsibility to leave camping/picnicking grounds in at least as good condition as they find them, and often must educate or clean up after the careless. The privilege of canoeing is at stake.*

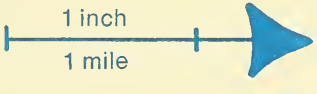
Canoeing the Main Stem

The six section maps are arranged in order from the headwaters in Hopkinton to the mouth at Boston Harbor. The top of each section follows the flow of the river downstream; the sections are continuous, each with a slight overlap.

Legend



Scale: 1 inch equals 1 mile and the North arrow on each map is marked to scale.



CAUTION: This entire upper portion of the river from the headwaters to Medway Dam (on Map 2) should not be attempted at other than time of high water, except in the ponded area behind the dams.

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map: Milford, Blackstone, and Franklin

Echo Lake to Dilla St. Dam (2.5 miles)

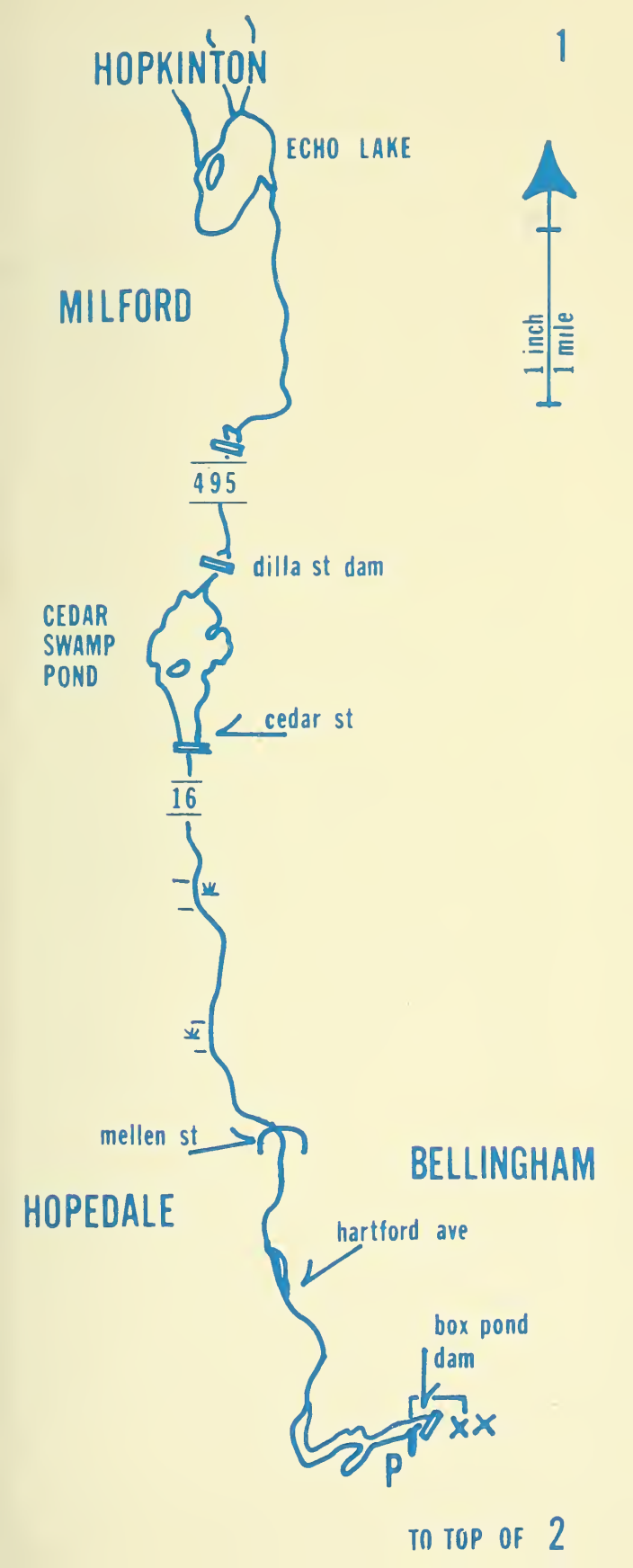
The river is too narrow and precipitous to be navigable. There is an 80-foot drop in elevation and the river's crystal-clear and cool waters flow through almost total wilderness. This area offers excellent opportunities for the hiker.

Dilla St. Dam to Box Pond Dam (5.5 miles)

Cedar Swamp Pond can be canoed, but its value is minimal at present. Milford's sanitary landfill is on the east shore and several industries are on the west bank. This pond formerly provided excellent fish habitat and, with the restoration of water quality, will again become a prime recreation area.

Below Cedar Swamp Pond Dam, the river goes underground beneath Rte. 16 and emerges as a completely channeled and fenced-off ditch. It then enters another box culvert beneath Archer Rubber Company on Central St. and there is no access.

Below Central St. the river can be navigated in high water, but one must travel upstream from the access at Mellen St., Hopedale, off Rte. 140 (parking available). Downstream from Mellen St., the remains of Factory Pond are passed at Hartford Ave. It once serviced the Bellingham Woolen and Cotton Manufactory. 1 mile downstream is Box Pond Dam, which must be portaged on the left.


HOPKINTON
ECHO LAKE
1 inch
1 mile
MILFORD
495
dilla st dam
CEDAR
SWAMP
POND
cedar st
16
mellen st
BELLINGHAM
HOPEDALE
hartford ave
box pond
dam
P

TO TOP OF 2

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map: Franklin, Holliston, and Medfield

Box Pond Dam to No. Bellingham Dam (3.5 miles)

3½ twisting miles through the Bellingham marshes brings the canoeist to the No. Bellingham Dam. In spite of the bisection by Rte. 495, many waterfowl may be observed in the marshes.

No. Bellingham Dam to Populatic St. (5.5 miles)

Three pleasant ponds make up this run, with an awkward portage through an industrial area at Careyville Dam on the left bank. At West Medway, there is an easy carry to the right of the dam.

Takeout or portage at the Medway Dam is difficult. One encounters the mill complex on the left bank and very steep terrain on the right, and the property across the bridge (Franklin St./Lincoln St.) is posted and enclosed by a high fence. Therefore portage on the right bank is possible but very difficult, and trespasses on the posted property.

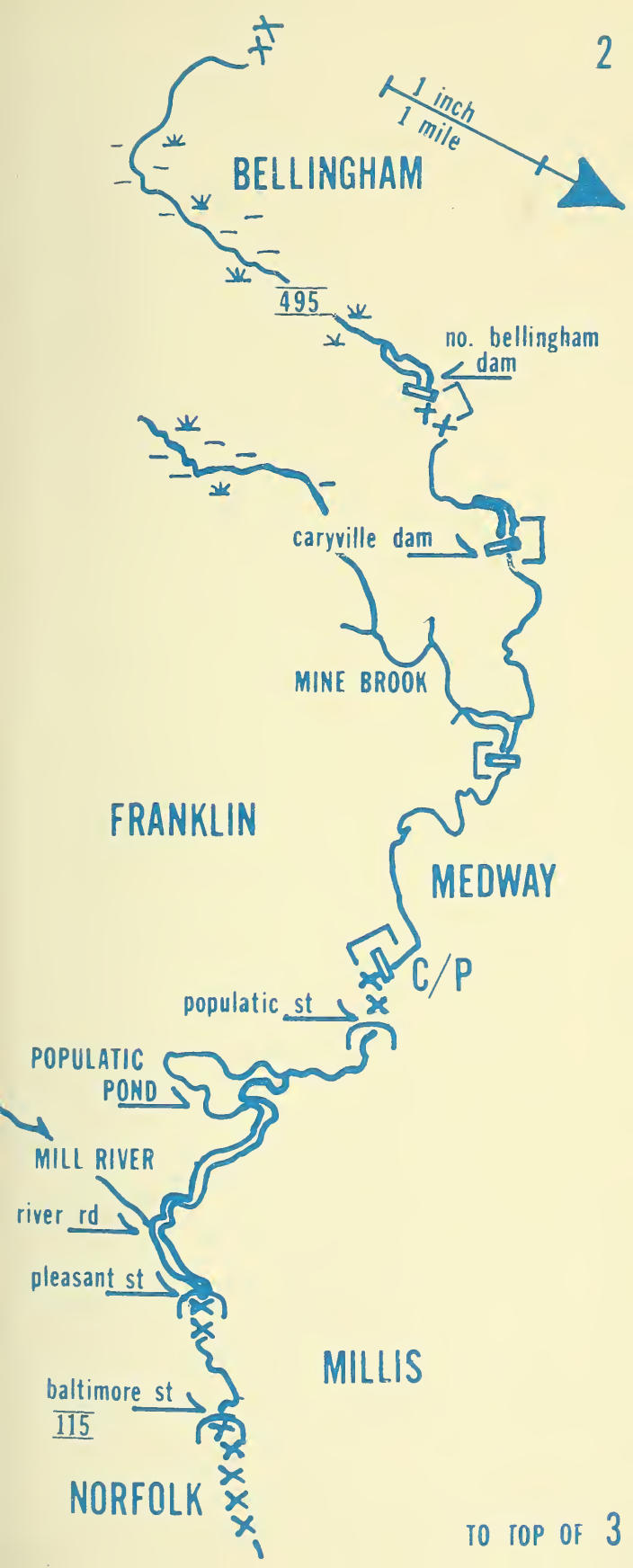
Below Medway Dam, an experienced canoeist can enjoy the ⅔ mile run through fast water in time of medium to high flow. It is enjoyable, passing through a beautiful wooded gorge. For the less expert, Populatic St. Bridge offers a convenient and safe launch site.

Populatic St. to Pleasant St. (3 miles)

Here is where the Charles begins its meandering flow in a wide channel. Here also is excellent fishing for largemouth bass, pickerel, and panfish. Another 1¼ mile downstream at the confluence with Mill River, the Charles is stocked with trout each spring. Mill River is canoeable (see Tributary section). Below Mill River, the canoeist quickly passes under the Myrtle St. Bridge and arrives at the Pleasant St. Bridge in ½ mile. At the upstream side of this bridge are the remains of an old dam. They create a hazard that can be passed on the right in medium to high water.

Pleasant St. to Forest Rd. (2.5 miles)

Below the Pleasant St. Bridge is more fast water, navigable to mid-May. In low water, the canoe can easily be "walked" over the gravel bottom. This is another trout-stocked area, usually productive while the water remains cool. A mile of easy going brings one to the Baltimore St. Bridge (Rte. 115) where another series of rapids begins, directly under the bridge. Pass to the left of center in sufficient water. *WATCH CAREFULLY*. Downstream are more fast areas with many boulders and several fallen trees.


1 inch
1 mile
BELLINGHAM
495
no. bellingham
dam
caryville dam
MINE BROOK
FRANKLIN
MEDWAY
C/P
populatic st
POPULATIC
POND
MILL RIVER
river rd
pleasant st
MILLIS
baltimore st
115
NORFOLK

TO TOP OF 3

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map: Medfield and Natick

Forest Rd. to Rte. 109 (3.5 miles)

1⅔ miles below Baltimore St. (Rte. 115) is Forest Rd. in Millis, one of the better launch or takeout sites. This is at the head of the vast Millis-Medfield marsh area in beautiful wild country. A short way downstream, just before the entrance of a small brook on the left, a ledge extends across the river and must be watched in low water. Somewhat farther down, the river parallels a dirt road (Dwight St.) and care should be taken as one swings to the right to go through the old bridge abutments. The granite blocks from the broken pier form a low-water barricade. Just below here, Stop River enters on the right. It provides another interesting side trip around the base of Noon Hill and upstream to Norfolk (see Tributary section). ¾ mile below this the Charles flows under Rte. 109.

Rte. 109 to So. Natick Dam (10 miles)

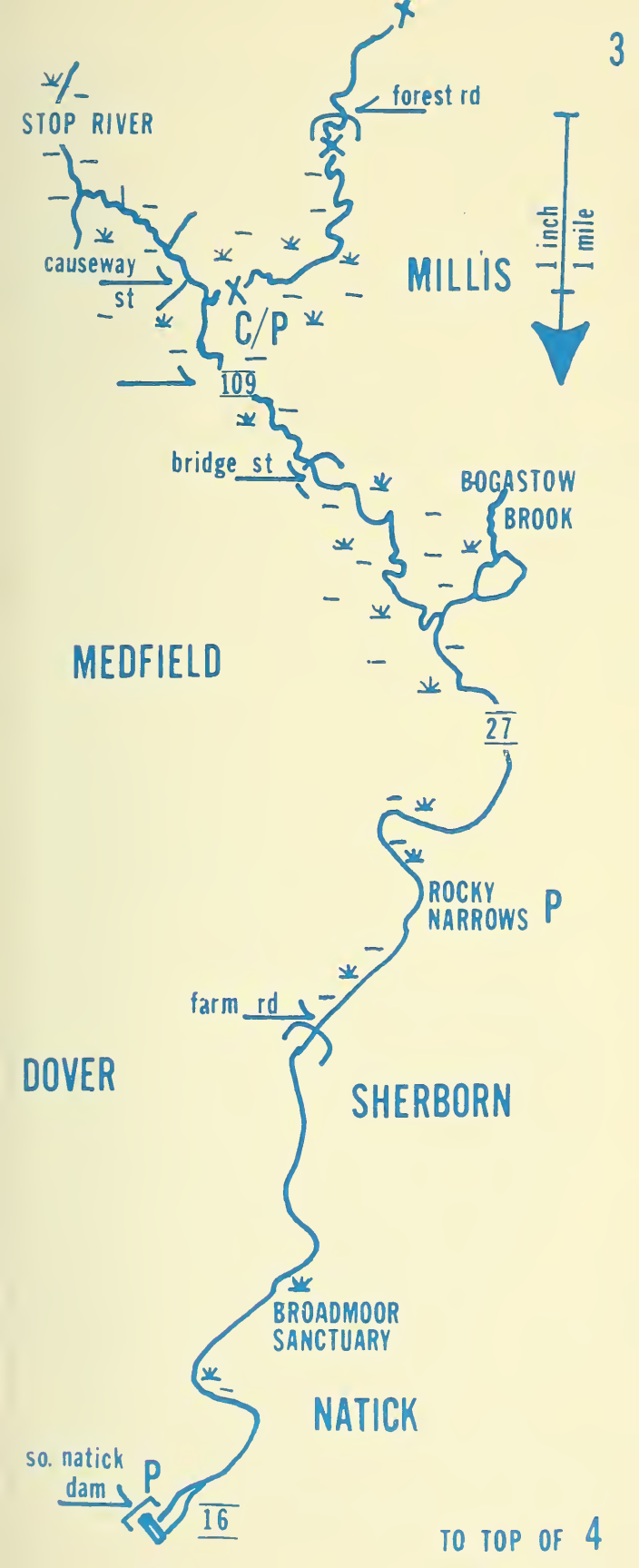
This reach is considered the most beautiful part of the Charles. Fortunately it is the most canoeable part, with no obstacles or portages.

2½ miles below Rte. 109, Bogastow Brook enters on the left. It is the longest tributary to the Charles River and it is possible to canoe upstream through South End Pond as far as Orchard St. (Rte. 115). Along the way, one passes through meadows, farmland, and forests (see Tributary section).

2 miles below Bogastow Brook lies Rocky Narrows Reservation, owned by the Trustees of Reservations. It is one of the most impressive natural areas on the river with steep forested slopes, a large pine grove, and easy access to several spots on the shoreline. It is a delightful place to stop for a rest or lunch.

Another 1½ miles downstream is Farm Rd./ Bridge St. where easy access is available on the right bank on land owned by the Dover Conservation Commission.

The remaining 3½-mile stretch is delightful, passing by several farms and estates, the lengthy shore property of Massachusetts Audubon Society's Broadmoor Sanctuary, and around the right-angle bend to parallel Eliot St. (Rte. 16) for the last mile. Takeout is easy on the right bank just upstream of the dam in a town park. The park encompasses both banks of the river between the dam and Pleasant St., and is an excellent example of good land use planning providing recreational opportunity for a large area.

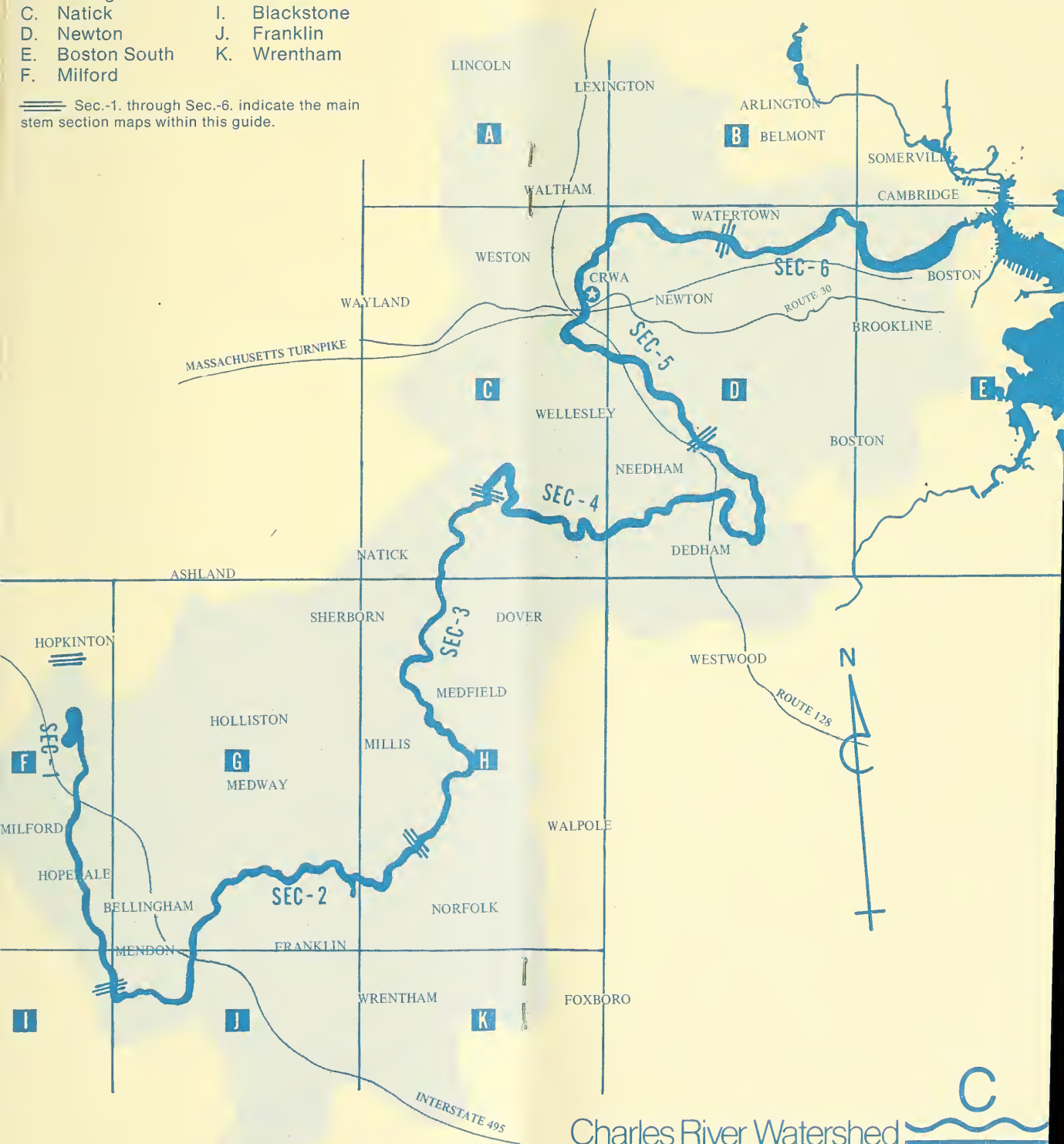

STOP RIVER
forest rd
causeway st
C/P
MILLIS
1 inch
1 mile
109
bridge st
BOGASTOW BROOK
MEDFIELD
27
ROCKY NARROWS
P
farm rd
DOVER
SHERBORN
BROADMOOR SANCTUARY
NATICK
so. natick dam
P
16

TO TOP OF 4

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for the Charles River Watershed

A. Concord
B. Lexington
C. Natick
D. Newton
E. Boston South
F. Milford
G. Holliston
H. Medfield
I. Blackstone
J. Franklin
K. Wrentham

Sec.-1. through Sec.-6. indicate the main stem section maps within this guide.



Charles River Watershed

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map: Natick and Newton

So. Natick Dam to Cochrane Dam (6.5 miles)

Access below the So. Natick Dam is steep and overgrown with poison-ivy. CRWA has permission to list Coatings Engineering as an access site, with limited parking in the visitor parking area. A canoe can be carried along the right side of the building, putting in at the mouth of the canal which borders the property. From here, some of the best pickerel and large-mouth bass fishing is available.

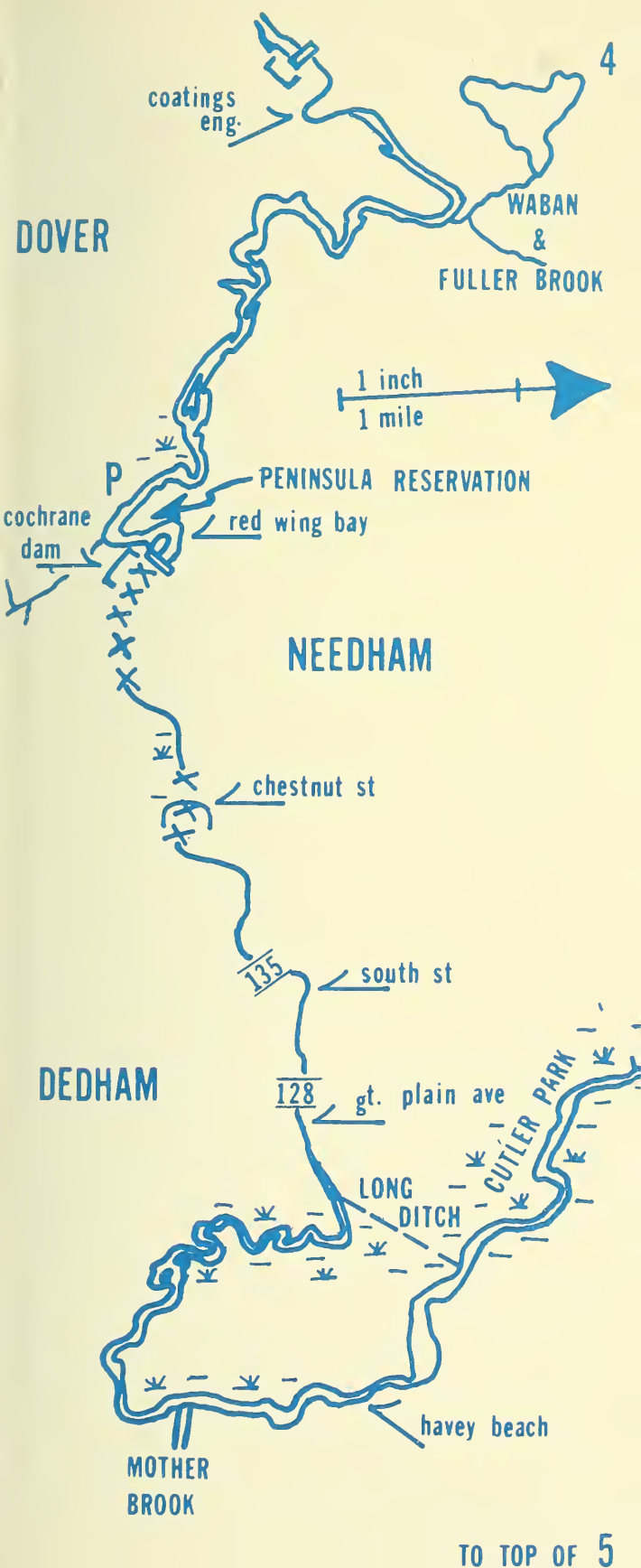
A short way downstream on the left, the flow from Waban and Fuller Brooks enters the river on the left. Waban Brook can be canoed into Lake Waban, providing a water tour of the Wellesley College grounds (see Tributary section).

Downstream on the Charles, several large coves are open to exploration. Also of interest is the Trustees of Reservations' Charles River Peninsula (29 acres). Immediately below this is the canoe rental facility at Red Wing Bay. (Note: the MDC plans to site more liveries downstream.) Opposite is Noanet Brook flowing from the hills of Dover, where Indian artifacts are still found.

Cochrane Dam to Havey Beach (7.5 miles)

With adequate flow, the fast water below the dam can be quite enjoyable (this is a training area for whitewater competition teams). The easiest launch is from the right bank where the MDC sewer conduit crosses. In low water, however, many large boulders crop up much of the way to and beyond Chestnut St. in Needham. The water directly under the Chestnut St. bridge is very shallow and should not be attempted in summer flow. 1½ miles downstream is the Dedham Ave. Bridge (Rte. 135). Just below on the left bank is an excellent access site off South St. on town-owned land, with ample parking.

Soon the river passes under the Rte. 128 bridges. About 1 mile downstream on the left is Long Ditch, just before the river bends sharply to the right. Long Ditch was dug in 1653 to prevent flooding of the meadows. In time of high water it is possible to canoe this ditch, cutting off the 4-mile circuit of the Dedham Loop. Continuing in the main stem meander, the river winds through the Dedham marshes, past the Noble and Greenough School, under two bridges, parallel to Rte. 1 with its commercial jungle, past the Mother Brook outflow structure, and then under Bridge St. where Havey Beach and the playground provide a welcome respite. From Havey Beach at the bottom of this map to Kendrick St. at the top of the next map is 5 miles of travel through Cow Island Pond and along the MDC's vast Cutler Park marshes.


coatings
eng.
DOVER
WABAN
&
FULLER BROOK
1 inch
1 mile
P
PENINSULA RESERVATION
cochrane
dam
red wing bay
NEEDHAM
chestnut st
135
south st
DEDHAM
128
gt. plain ave
CUTLER PARK
LONG
DITCH
havey beach
MOTHER
BROOK

TO TOP OF 5

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map: Natick and Newton

Kendrick St. Bridge to Moody St. Dam (9.5 miles)

Cutler Park extends to Kendrick St. Bridge where there is another excellent access site on the left bank below the bridge. 1 mile downstream is the heavily-industrialized area between Needham and Newton at Highland Ave. Another mile of travel brings the canoeist to the Elliot St. Bridge and the Silk Mill Dam at the head of Hemlock Gorge.

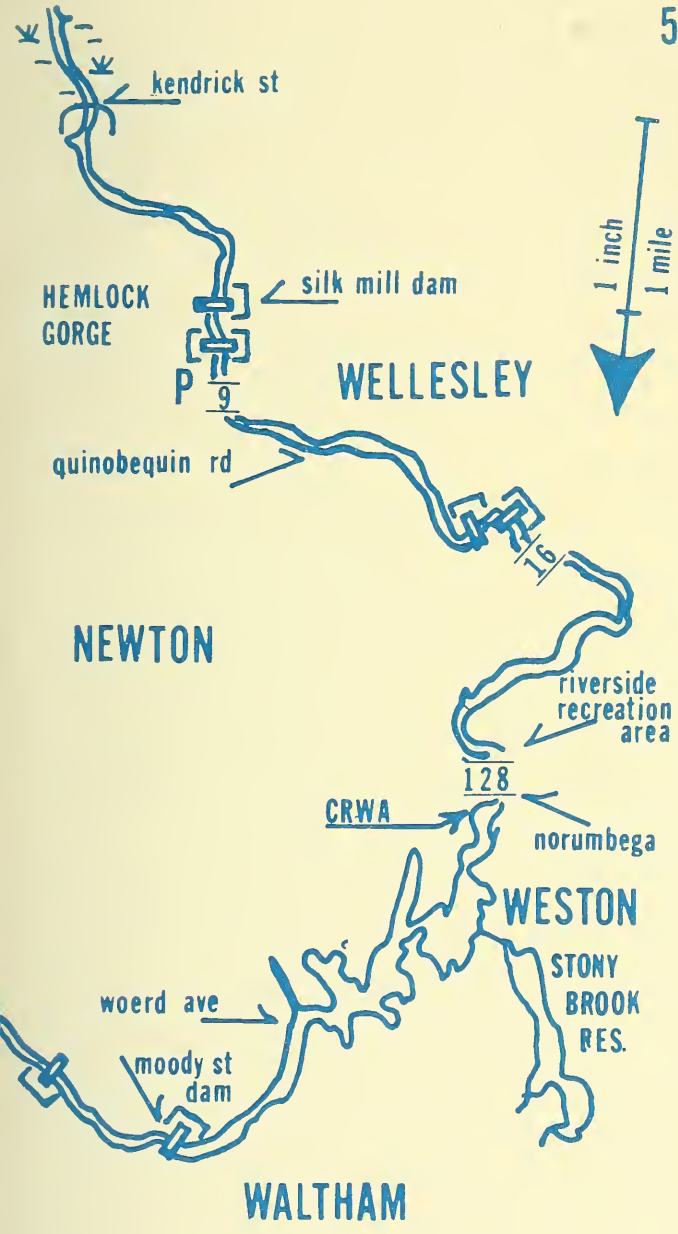
Silk Mill Dam can be portaged on the left after a takeout at the end of the chain-link fence. Hemlock Gorge is a beautiful though brief excursion with many attractions for the botanist. Aside from the many magnificent Hemlocks, there are Witch Hazel, Blue-beech, Mulberry, American Chestnut, and a host of groundcovers and understory shrubs.

The river passes under Echo Bridge which carries the Sudbury Aqueduct, then arrives at the Metropolitan Circular Dam just before Rt. 9. This can be portaged by a steep bank on the left or by carry under Rte. 9 by way of Quinobequin Rd. on the right. In the next two miles of easy paddling, the canoeist can contrast the quiet parkland on the right shore with the din of Rte. 128 on the left.

Cordingly Dam is the next obstacle where the carry is to the left and the launch is below the rapids. Very quickly, Newton Lower Falls is reached. It is possible to find space between the shrubs on the left bank, carry across Washington St. (Rte. 16), and put in on the right. A short way below, the river winds through the Leo J. Martin Memorial Golf Course and past the former Riverside Recreation Area (which latter the MDC plans to rebuild). After a cacophonous passage through the Rte. 128/Mass. Turnpike concrete forest, one reaches Norumbega. The duck feeding station is on the left and the opposite cove is occupied by the MDC Police Station and the CRWA headquarters. The old Norumbega boathouse has been replaced by a large motor hotel. This area is the gateway to the "lakes district", a thoroughly beautiful section where the Moody St. impoundment has spread the river into broad coves up to ½ mile wide. Ducks, Shorebirds, and even an occasional Great Blue Heron are spotted here. The fishing for warm-water species is excellent.

Moody St. Dam can be portaged but not with ease. Takeout is on the right at a dock on the downstream end of the Grover Cronin store parking lot behind the store block. One must go around the riverbank fencing and then down a steep 15-foot bank to the river.

A mile downstream is Bleachery Dam.


kendrick st
HEMLOCK GORGE
silk mill dam
1 inch
1 mile
P 9
WELLESLEY
quinobequin rd
16
NEWTON
riverside recreation area
128
CRWA
norumbega
WESTON
STONY BROOK RES.
woerd ave
moody st dam
WALTHAM

TO TOP OF 6

USGS Topographic Quadrangles for this map:
Newton and Boston South

Bleachery Dam to Charles River Basin (2 miles)

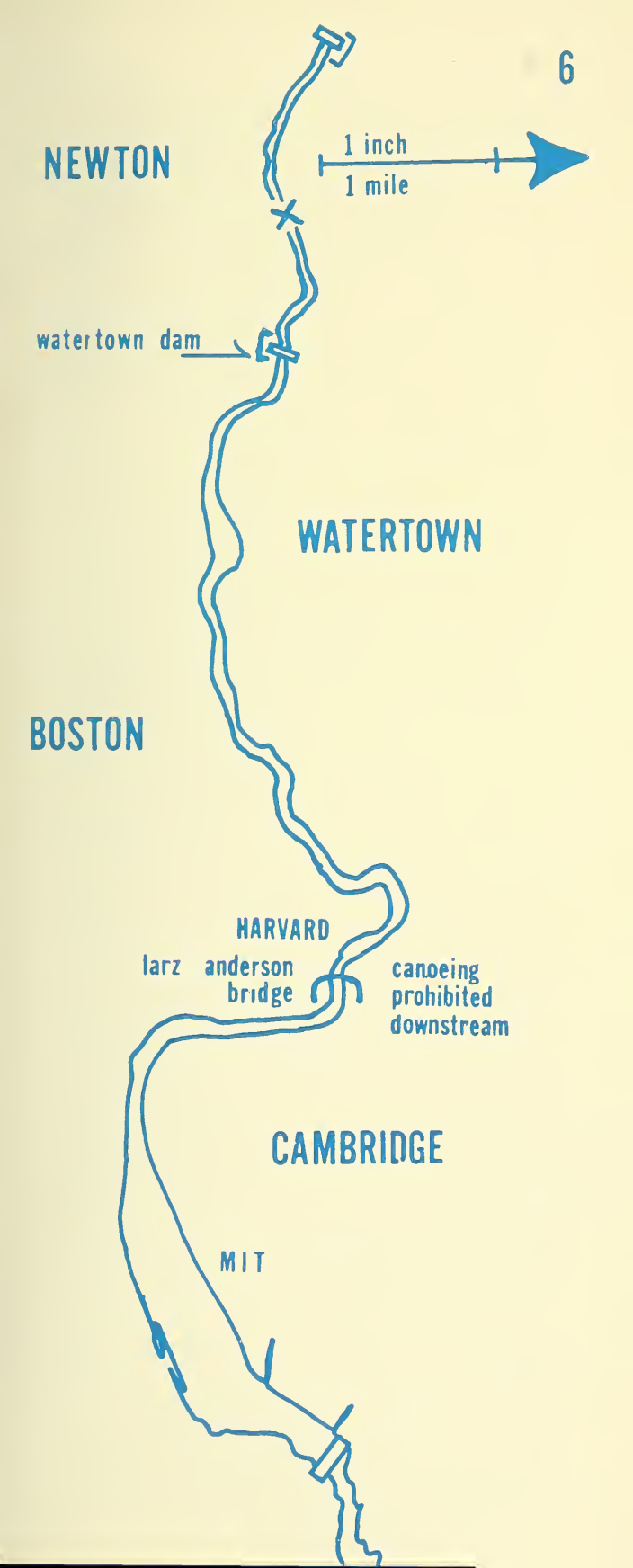
An awkward carry is again necessary at Bleachery Dam. It is through the Zayre/Star Market parking lots on the left bank and through a gate to a walkway along the riverbank.

A mile past the Bleachery Dam is the remains of the Rolling Stone (Bemis) Dam. In time of low flow, the portage is over an island at mid-river. Another mile brings the canoeist to Watertown Dam, where the parkland on the right bank provides an easy carry to the rapids below the dam.

Charles River Basin (9 miles)

CAUTION: Canoeing is not permitted below the Larz Anderson Bridge.

9 miles of flat water is the basic characteristic of this pool, yet the hazards are ever present with large power boats, skulling crews, sailing craft, retaining walls, and high winds below the area of the Larz Anderson Bridge. Above this bridge, access is easy over the bordering parklands, but access below is restricted to the few boat club docks and the Science Museum dock at the Charles River Dam. As a safety measure, the MDC has prohibited canoeing below the Larz Anderson Bridge, but it is hoped that revised regulations may permit some relaxation of this restriction. A memorial to the foresight of Frederick Law Olmsted, the basin should be open for the enjoyment of all, whether from the shore or from the water.


NEWTON
1 inch
1 mile
watertown dam
WATERTOWN
BOSTON
HARVARD
larz anderson bridge
canoeing prohibited downstream
CAMBRIDGE
MIT

Charles River Tributaries

Seventy-eight streams enter the Charles River, but only a few are of any interest to the canoeist or fisherman. It is this relatively small group which is considered here.

Echo Lake. Considered as the headwater of the Charles, this impoundment is truly a jewel in the wilderness of Hopkinton and northern Milford. As the water supply reservoir for Milford and Mendon, its use is restricted, and permission for access must be obtained from the Milford Water Company.

River Mile 79. Length .8 miles. Milford Quadrangle.

Mine Brook. This brook is canoeable but the effluent from the Franklin sewage treatment plant enters just below Rte. 495, and the heavy pollution load makes the brook undesirable at present. When the treatment plant relocates, Mine Brook will be a useful and interesting tributary. It begins as Miscoe Brook in the southernmost extremity of the watershed in Wrentham and as Dix Brook out of Woodward Swamp in Franklin. Mine Brook flows through Franklin, crossing under Rte. 495, and entering the Charles just above the West Medway Dam.

River Mile 63.2. Length 12 miles. Franklin to Holliston Quadrangle.

Mill River. Good canoeing and fishing. Trout Pond at the base of Knuckup Hill in Wrentham and Uncas Pond in Franklin are the headwaters. They feed Lake Pearl and Lake Archer, both hard-bottom clearwater lakes. The outflow travels north under Rte. 140 as Eagle Brook, reaching the Bush Pond impoundment at Lawrence St. in Norfolk. From here the flow is officially the Mill River. It continues to City Mills Pond (owned by the Norfolk Conservation Commission), then flows free to be joined by Miller and Cress Brooks before entering the Charles at River Rd.

River Mile 57.6. Length 7 miles. Wrentham to Medfield Quadrangle.

Stop River. This stream has great potential. It is canoeable as far up as the Highland Lake outflow, with high scenic values all the way. Native brook trout were caught before the construction of the Norfolk sewage treatment plant which is scheduled to be rebuilt.

The main branch begins in a large spring in a railroad embankment in the Pondville section of Norfolk, and flows directly into the Massachusetts Correctional Institution property north of Rte. 1A. The Stony Brook branch begins in and near Mirror Lake on the Norfolk/Wrentham boundary, and flows northerly to Stony Brook on the Bristol-Blake State Reservation/Stony Brook Sanctuary of Massachusetts Audubon Society. Stony Brook then joins Stop River within the prison property.

Below the Highland Lake impoundment, the effluent from the MCI sewage treatment plant enters with a resulting degradation in water quality. Several feeders enter this tributary, the largest of which include Horse Brook (Danielson Pond and Kingsbury Pond) and Sewall Brook, which enters just before the confluence of Stop River with the Charles in the Medfield marshes.

River Mile 51.8. Length 7 miles. Wrentham to Medfield Quadrangle.

Bogastow Brook. This is another stream of high recreational value, offering open water to the canoeist and water quality to support a trout population. This is the largest tributary of the Charles with a drainage of 25.5 square miles.

From the base of Bald Hill in Holliston, Jar Brook feeds Houghton and Linden Ponds – the latter's outflow becomes Bogastow Brook. It is joined by Dopping Brook across the Holliston/Sherborn border, and flows southeasterly for about 9 miles before turning north at Great Black Swamp. From here it continues through forest and open land to Bogastow Pond at Rte. 115, then through farmland and meadows to the Medfield State Hospital.

River Mile 48.4. Length 12 miles. Holliston to Medfield Quadrangle.

Waban Brook/Fuller Brook. Canoeing is possible from the main stem to Lake Waban where warm-water fishing is usually good and the Wellesley College campus provides an attractive setting.

From a swamp near the Mass. Turnpike in Weston, Bogle Brook flows westerly into Nonesuch Pond on the Weston/Natick border. It then flows southerly into Morse's Pond and Lake Waban, below which it becomes Waban Brook for its short flow to the Charles. Fuller Brook has its origin in the marshy area behind the TV towers, and is soon nurtured by the leachates from the Wellesley incinerator landfill. Flowing through suburban Wellesley, Fuller joins Waban Brook just upstream of the Sudbury Aqueduct, 600 feet above the confluence with the Charles.

River Mile 39.4. Total lengths 9 miles. Natick Quadrangle.

Stony Brook. Good trout water exists in the upper areas in Lincoln and Weston, but it is not canoeable. The lower reaches of the second largest Charles River tributary are public water supply and not available for recreational use.

River Mile 14.7. Length 7 miles. Concord to Natick Quadrangle.

Beaver Brook. Recreational and scenic values exist only in the upper reaches from Lexington to the MDC reservation in Waltham. Below this, the brook is severely polluted and is culverted at its confluence with the Charles.

River Mile 12.2. Length 6 miles. Lexington to Newton Quadrangle.

Charles River Access Sites

This is an annotated listing from the headwaters to the mouth.

Location	River Mile
Map 1.	
Cedar Swamp Pond, Rte. 85, Milford Town-owned land. To be developed as part of Charles River Park.	76
Mellen St., Hopedale Off Rte. 140. Badly polluted at present. Narrow channel.	73
Hartford Ave., Bellingham/Milford Limited roadside parking.	72
Box Pond Dam, Bellingham Box Pond Rd. off Depot St.	70.5
Map 2.	
No. Bellingham Dam, Bellingham Maple St. off Hartford Ave. Access through mill property.	66
Careyville Dam, Bellingham Good access above dam, poor below.	65
Populatic St. Bridge, Medway Limited parking opposite Your Laundry. Excellent downstream run.	60.5
Populatic Pond, Norfolk Public access on east shore, junction Priscilla Ave. and Lakeshore Dr.	59
River Rd., Norfolk Mill River confluence. Parking in adjacent field. Good launch site.	57.5
Pleasant St., Millis Limited parking. Launch difficult in low water. Rapids.	57
Baltimore St., Rte. 115, Millis Land posted for conservation purposes; no restriction on canoeing.	56
Map 3.	
Forest Rd., Millis Excellent access. Plenty of parking.	54.5
Causeway St., Medfield On Stop River – short distance to Charles. Scenic marshes upstream on Stop River.	51.5
Rte. 109, Medfield/Millis Steep bank, adequate parking.	51
Bridge St., Rte. 115, Medfield/Millis Good access by car.	50
Rte. 27, Medfield/Sherborn Steep terrain, but easy access.	47
Farm Rd./Bridge St., Dover/Sherborn Ideal, parking on town land.	44.5
So. Natick Dam, Natick Excellent access upstream through town park.	41

Location	River Mile
Map 4.	
Coatings Engineering Co., So. Natick For downstream access, use mouth of canal at right of building. See text for detail.	40.5
Red Wing Bay, Fisher St., Needham YMCA Canoe Rental. Excellent facility.	35
Cochrane Dam, Needham/Dover Shallow rapids below dam. Caution.	34.5
Chestnut St., Needham Limited access over MDC sewer easement. Shallow water under bridge.	33
South St., Needham – downstream of Rte. 135 Good access and parking. Town property.	31.5
Great Plain Ave., Needham – downstream of Rte. 128 Ideal – town-owned.	30
Havey Beach, Dedham/West Roxbury MDC-owned. Excellent access on both banks; parking available on West Roxbury side only.	27
Map 5.	
Kendrick St., Needham – left bank Excellent launch. Off-street parking.	22
Hemlock Gorge – downstream of Silk Mill Dam, Newton Upper Falls Parking in Elliot St. lot. Carry around dam.	20.5
Quinobequin Rd., Waban Easy parking and access. MDC-owned.	19
Riverside, Weston Ideal park and launch on MDC land. Scheduled for recreational redevelopment.	16
Norumbega Duck Feeding Station, Weston Large parking area. Launch facilities not good but useable. MDC-owned.	15
Woerd Ave., Waltham Good access and parking. MDC-owned.	13
Moody St. Dam, Waltham Dock available. Difficult carry below dam.	12.5
Map 6.	
Watertown Dam, Watertown Good access above and below dam but rapids below. Caution.	9.5
Basin area above Larz Anderson Bridge Entire area parkland. Access almost anywhere.	

NOTES

Copies of the CHARLES RIVER CANOE GUIDE are available for $1 from the Charles River Watershed Association, 2391 Commonwealth Avenue, Auburndale, Massachusetts 02166. Telephone: 527-2799

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